Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

Claim 1 (canceled)

Claim 2 (currently amended): A gripping shaft [~~as recited in claim 1, wherein:~~] having an elongated cylindrical body with two, opposite end portions, said end portions defining a shaft longitudinal axis of the shaft, said shaft having an intermediate body portion between the opposite end portions, comprising:

a generally cylindrical light weight tube having an internal wall, an external wall, and two opposite ends joining the shaft end portions, said opposite ends defining a tube longitudinal axis, said tube being made from a material having resistance to torsional deflection and bending;

a plurality of elongated, parallel, longitudinal rails radially attached to the tube external wall and forming, in conjunction with said tube, the shaft intermediate body portion, said rails lying in longitudinal planes parallel to the tube and shaft longitudinal axes, said rails being equally spaced about the tube external wall, said individual rails assembled circumferentially creating a cylindrical profile termed a gripping shaft outer diameter, each said rail containing a plurality of gripping elements, sliding strips and rotational balance correction weights;

a protective end external sleeve forming each said shaft end portion and positioned about and joined to the tube external wall, said protective end external sleeve having an inner surface and an outer surface, said protective end external sleeve being made from a material having a wear resistance, impact and shock resistance, and dimensional stability;

an inner sleeve having an inner surface and an outer surface, positioned within and joined to the tube internal wall beginning approximately at the junction between said shaft intermediate body portion and shaft end portion and extending toward the shaft end portion a predetermined distance;

wherein each said longitudinal rail has an inner surface and an outer surface, said rail inner surface matching tangentially the tube external wall, said rail outer surface having two longitudinal channels, a first channel and a second channel, said second channel having a subchannel formed therein, said subchannel providing means for holding and positioning weights for balancing the gripping shaft, said second channel providing means for holding sliding strips which protrude above the rail outer surface, said first channel containing a gripping element comprised of:

an elongated expandable pneumatic bladder;

two elongated, protective polymer strips placed under and over the bladder;

an elongated rubber gripping element placed over one of said polymer strips adjacent the rail outer surface.

Claim 3 (currently amended). A gripping shaft as recited in claim 2, wherein:

each protective end external sleeve has a plurality of channels formed therein corresponding to the rail first [~~channel~~] channels, said gripping elements continuing through the protective end channels and terminating near to the gripping shaft end portions, said bladder having an end terminating in a valve assembly interconnected to an air manifold.

Claim 4 (original): A gripping shaft as recited in claim 3, wherein:

said tube is made from a material dissimilar to said rails, protective end external sleeves and inner sleeve.

Claim 5 (currently amended): A gripping shaft as recited in claim 4, wherein:

said tube is made of a carbon [~~finer~~] fiber material.

Claim 6 (original): A gripping shaft as recited in claim 5, wherein:

said rails are made from aluminum.

Claim 7 (original): A gripping shaft as recited in claim 6, wherein:

said inner sleeve and protective end external sleeves are made from steel.

Claim 8 (original): A gripping shaft as recited in claim 7, wherein:

said sliding strips are made from an ultra-high molecular weight polymer.

Claim 9 (original): A gripping shaft as recited in claim 8, wherein:

the rails are attached to the tube utilizing a threaded fastener connection with slotted holes in the rails.

Claim 10 (original): A gripping shaft as recited in claim 9, wherein:

said first channel, second channel and subchannel each have an interlocking cross section.

Claim 11 (original): A gripping shaft as recited in claim 10, wherein:

said weights are comprised of flat bar stock.